

Autistic pupils taking unique next steps in their lives with school moves

MOTHERS TELL OF TRANSFORMATIONS



Harrison Owers

EXCITED parents are watching their young children take a unique step away from their highly specialist school.

Chatten Free School opened in Witham in 2021 to provide a highly specialist day school for children who cannot access education in any other Send (special educational and disabilities) settings.

All students have an autism diagnosis and associated complex needs – and many were previously out of the education system or facing no alternative but to live in care.

This September, two pupils are taking the unusual step of moving away from the highly specialist environment – where every pupil has one-to-one support and a bespoke curriculum – to move to less intensive provisions.

Harrison Owers, 6, from Chelmsford, joined Chatten Free School two years ago, having been held back a year at nursery while his EHCP was completed.

At the time, Harrison was non-verbal, not toilet trained and had destructive behavioural issues.

His mum Abbey said: “Our main reason for choosing Chatten was the one-to-one support and the tailored learning plans for each pupil. We felt like Harrison would really benefit from this, especially being held back a year and having a learning plan that suits him and his needs while also pushing him to do more.”

“We were uncertain how the future would look for Harrison before he started at Chatten. We expected him to need a lot of sup-



Harrison Chapman

port throughout adulthood.”

Now, Harrison has progressed so well, he is joining The Edith Borthwick School, a special school in Braintree.

As well as now being toilet trained, he can also communicate via an app and complete daily life skills such as making himself a drink and getting dressed and undressed. Abbey said: “Chatten have taught him to use a tablet with a communication app on it which has helped us so much, as most of Harrison’s meltdowns were due to not being able to tell us what he wanted. The school also helped us to get funding for a device with the app installed on it. Harrison now says a handful of words and copies a lot of noises.”

“We now believe Harrison will need minimal support as an adult – his future is looking bright. We’re so very appreciative of everything the staff at Chatten have done for him since he started there.”

For Harrison Chapman, 7, from South Woodham Ferrers, the new

school year brings a whole new positive chapter at Columbus School, a special school in Chelmsford.

Having spent an hour on the floor overwhelmed and crying during a “horrendous” visit to a mainstream school, his parents decided the then non-verbal five-year-old needed more specialist support.

His mum Jenni said: “Harrison was being home-schooled, but not very successfully. When we discovered Chatten Free School, we worried it was a bit far from home. But, as soon as we saw it, we fell in love with it. Everyone was so friendly, and he would have his own one-to-one. Back then, his future was not looking very good. He was still in nappies, and we thought we would be his carers for the rest of our lives. It was going to be a nightmare.”

“But, slowly, he started speaking and telling us, in sentences, what he needed and asking to go to the toilet. He started brushing his own teeth and even making his own sandwiches. We thought ‘oh my goodness, this is so good.’ Now, he is talking non-stop! He is so independent. We did not think that was possible.”

“Now, I can see him living independently and being able to work. He is so keen to interact and make friends, which he will be able to do even more at his new school. He has done fantastically well there.”

“The staff have been brilliant. He is like a different child. We are completely shocked.”

Head of school Adam Dean said: “As a school, we are incredibly proud of what these two pupils have achieved. That two of our pupils have progressed enough that they no longer require our very specialist approach is a massive achievement we will all be celebrating.”

IN BRIEF

Writtle-bred horse enters record books

A HORSE bred at ARU Writtle has completed an unprecedented double-double.

Lordships Graffalo and rider Ros Canter entered the history books after winning the prestigious Burghley Horse Trials for the second year running.

Earlier this year, the pair also won their second Badminton title, meaning Lordships Graffalo is the only horse to have won both of the UK’s blue riband horse trials on two occasions.

Lordships Graffalo’s early life was spent at ARU Writtle, near Chelmsford, which is part of Anglia Ruskin University and is one of the UK’s leading centres for equine education and performance.

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Don't miss your opportunity to join Waverley as she returns to London and the Thames Estuary from Wednesday 24th September until Sunday 12th October.

CRUISES FROM SOUTHEND PIER

CLACTON STEAM ROUND PRINCIPALITY OF SEALAND
WEDNESDAY September 24 - Leave 12noon, back 7:15pm
Join Waverley for a one-way cruise to Clacton-on-Sea £45, cruise to the seaside resort of Clacton-on-Sea for time ashore £51, Seniors £49, or stay aboard Waverley for a special sailing along the Essex Coast and round the Principality of Sealand. Live entertainment will be provided by musical duo Eclipse performing hits from the 60s - meet Pirate Radio DJs and hear the commentary on the history of Sealand £56. Return by coach from Clacton.
SENIOR BRING A FRIEND HALF FARE
Buy one Senior (60 & over) ticket & get a second Senior HALF FARE. Advance booking only.

CLACTON RIVER BLACKWATER & ROUND MY ROSS REVENGE
TUESDAY September 30 - Leave 12:30pm, back 7:15pm
Cruise to the seaside resort of Clacton-on-Sea one-way £45, for time ashore and return £51, Senior £49, or join an afternoon cruise to the River Blackwater and round MY Ross Revenge £56. Meet Radio Caroline DJs and enjoy a special commentary from Radio Caroline's Ray Clarke. Musical entertainment will be provided by musical duo Eclipse as they perform hits from the 60s. Return by coach from Clacton.
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THAMES FORTS - RED SANDS & SHIVERING SANDS
79TH ANNIVERSARY OF WAVERLEY'S LAUNCH
THURSDAY October 2 - Leave 1:20pm, back 4pm
Join Waverley for an afternoon cruise of the Thames Estuary to the Mausell Forts of Red Sands and Shivering Sands Stay. Enjoy a good old fashioned Cockney knees up sing-a-long with Tom Carradine in the Jeanie Deans Lounge £46.
SENIOR BRING A FRIEND HALF FARE
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THAMES FORTS - SHIVERING SANDS, RED SANDS & KNOCK JOHN
VIEW THREE SETS OF THAMES FORTS
SATURDAY October 4 - Leave 1:30pm, back 5pm
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RIVER MEDWAY & VIEW MEDWAY QUEEN
SUNDAY October 5 - Leave 1:30pm, back 5pm
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VISIT WHITSTABLE
SATURDAY October 11 - Leave 1:15pm, back 5:30pm
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CRUISE TWINKLING THAMES & FLOODLIT TOWER BRIDGE
Join Waverley for an evening cruise up the River Thames to London. View the ever changing River Thames - the Flood Barrier, O2 Arena and Canary Wharf before steaming under the floodlit Tower Bridge and into the Pool of London. One way to London £49, with coach return to Southend £57.

SATURDAY September 27 - Leave 6pm, arrive London 9:45pm, back 11:15pm
WEDNESDAY October 1 - Leave 4:30pm, arrive London 8pm, back 9:45pm
SATURDAY October 4 - Leave 5:15pm, arrive London 8:50pm, back 10:30pm
SUNDAY October 5 - Leave 5:15pm, arrive London 9pm, back 10:45pm
FRIDAY October 10 - Leave 4pm, arrive London 8pm, back 9:45pm
SATURDAY October 11 - Leave 5:45pm, arrive London 9:30pm
SUNDAY October 12 - Leave 5:05pm, arrive London 8:50pm, back 10:30pm

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